

**By Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Todd Oliver**  
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Civics 101 is about to become the subject of much debate, some curiosity, some anxiety, some disappointment and a betting man might wager, some pain.

After more than 30 years of totalitarian, brutal, despot rule the city of Kirkuk is on the eve of its first election. While voting booths, exit polls, live news coverage and after- election parties are still a ways away, a group of 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade officers here are about to put into action a plan they hope will let this city take its first infant steps towards freedom.

“I believe the city is ready for elections,” said Lt. Col. Randy George, 173d Abn Bde, deputy commanding officer. “Obviously they’re tense, it’s a new process. Democracy is a new thing, something they’ve never done before but for the last month they’ve started into this, and they’ve made a lot of progress. They’ve formed a counsel and they’ve come to a consensus and they’ve learned to compromise.”

Because of the history and the lack of knowledge citizen’s have about basic democratic processes, it fell onto the shoulders of a group of officers to develop a system that will literally stand up a representative government—where before there was only a dictatorial ruling class structure.

These are armor, infantry, artillery, legal, chemical and aviation officers taking—what some would call historic—first steps to bring Kirkuk out of a dark, vile past and into the light of modern society. Today they sit at a conference table, hashing out details many of us never think about, because we haven’t had to, the foundation of a government, the very process itself of government.

One man sits at the table, huddled over schedules, sample ballots and timelines is Lt. Col. Todd Megill. He’s assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and is working within the election process as the Division’s Selection’s Support Team Chief. While it maybe true that no man can fully grasp the changes Kirkuk is about to embark upon, Megill comes the closest to understanding them at their base level. After all he, along with the others, designed the election process, chose the number of elected seats that will soon be filled, decided who could vote and set the schedule for tomorrow’s election.

“Kirkuk, partly because of the excellent work the 173d Abn Bde did here, is the furthest along (of other major cities in Iraq) in terms of evolving towards a democratic process,” Megill explained. “We looked at the city and asked ourselves, how big of a pool of delegates do we need to have and (to answer that question) we looked at the physical structure of the government house.”

The building’s size and condition was important because no one here has even the slightest idea of exactly who makes up this city of eight hundred thousand. No accurate census has been done in recent memory and with the Ba’ath parties Arabization of the region, who controls what and who has the largest population among Kirkuks many ethnic groups is anyone’s guess. The problem is baffling just from a statistical standpoint; add in some racial violence, ethnic hatred and a whole lot of distrust and it quickly becomes an issue of monumental proportions.

“We said look, the maximum amount of people we can control in here is 300. That’s how many the auditorium holds. That sounds kind of trite but we had to draw a line somewhere about how many delegates we could have,” Megill said.

With that first line drawn out the group moved on to determine how many of those 300 delegates would be allowed, for lack of a better term, to become political leaders.

At this point in steps the next hurdle, one of many facing this community, the Ba’ath party. Most Arabs as well as a few Kurdish and Turkomen, were Ba’ath party members, it was a matter of feeding your family on some levels though, Megill explained.

It was far more sinister on other levels.

“We have talked with the local community and they’ve pointed out the people that would be considered ‘bad Ba’aths’. We conducted a vetting process and went out and looked at those people. If we found that they had strong Ba’ath ties we determined that they were people that did not need to have a strong influence in the government,” he said.

“Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s it became an issue where people would join the party because it was the way you got a better job or a better education. And people did that; they sold their souls to the devil, so to speak, to survive. And we had to be very careful in our processes to understand that. If you threw out all the

Ba'athists you would probably disenfranchise and isolate the entire Arab population. It was primarily an Arab organization," he said.

Besides the current ethnic groups, Megill explained that they discovered a lot of local non-political leaders within the community. Businessmen, clerics and technocrats that needed, and were needed, to add their leadership's skills but were not represented by any of the current political parties.

These leaders became known as the independents.

"These are professional minded people who are thinking beyond their ethnicity and ethnic politics," Megill said. "Besides the independents each ethnic group has the same number of representatives, six. There will be six Assyrians, six turkomen, six kurds and six Arabs. There will also be six independents that hopefully adds a balancing factor."

This body of thirty forms the interim council that will govern Kirkik until general elections can be held in the unforeseen future.

"There was no democratic process to select the original 300, they were chosen by Americans," Megill said. "However we threw the net as broad and as wide as we could to include people that we don't necessarily like, we wanted to be as inclusive and representative as we could. But we want people that can work together, we don't want to radicalize the city council."

The councils leadership positions, the mayoral offices and the like, will undergo a similar selection process.

"Col. Mayville, Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Commander, the political advisor and a small facilitating team will work with the council for the next three days to elect three assistant mayors, one for deba'athification, one for resettlement issues and one for government design," Megill said.

The mayor himself and his deputy are to be chosen in a similar manor.

This group will also look at the council's nominations for the mayor. They will get at least three nominations for mayor. The top candidate will become the mayor and then there will be a runoff election to determine who is the deputy mayor with third place winning a trip to the door and an invitation to try again.

"This encourages them to put their best candidates forward," Megill said.

"The real problem is that these people don't have any understanding of representative democracy," Megill said. "They understand politics very well, they understand power better than you or I do ... they needed too to work with the old regime, because to screw that up meant you could really get yourself hurt."

"It will take time, I don't know how long it will take before the city and the council will latch on to these ideas, but they have to be given the time. We've got to allow them to try. If it doesn't work, we can always clear the deck but you have to give them the chance. We're trying to make an active, capable provincial government," he said. "We have to take the risk, they have to be given the power to try."